

The Landscape Research Centre

Archaeological Evaluation at the Old Vicarage, Sherburn, North Yorkshire



A pre-planning archaeological assessment
of land to be used for the siting of two new houses
on behalf of Mr Preston Lovegrove, The Old Vicarage, Sherburn

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DEVELOPMENT
MANAGEMENT

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Report information

Client	Mr Preston Lovegrove
Report type	Archaeological evaluation
Parish	Sherburn
County	North Yorkshire
Central grid reference	SE 9583328 7720152
Report number	LRC 117
Site code	540
Date of Fieldwork	26-28/10/2010
Date of report	20/11/2010
Fieldwork personnel	Gigi Signorelli MA , Kirk Robertson MSc
Report by	Gigi Signorelli MA
Produced by	The Landscape Research Centre Ltd



Figure 1 The extent of the area covered by the geophysical survey (in red) on a background map of Sherburn taken from Google Earth

Introduction

The Landscape Research Centre has been actively engaged in excavation and research in the area around Sherburn, in the Vale of Pickering for more than 30 years. This research has revealed that Sherburn can trace its origins in substantially the same setting back to the middle of the Iron Age at least (c.500BC). It is very unusual to find modern villages with this level of settlement continuity, continuity that may have been secured by the presence of a church in the 8th. century AD. As such Sherburn can be considered nationally important in terms of its archaeology, which has suffered very badly over the last three decades as a consequence of infill building within the village.

The Landscape Research Centre was commissioned by Mr Preston Lovegrove to undertake an archaeological evaluation by two trial trenches in the area of the Old Vicarage garden. The site is located at SE 9583328 7720152 (Figure 1).

The archaeological evaluation was undertaken in advance of a proposed newly development of the southern end of the Old Vicarage garden. Each trench measuring 3.00m by 1.50m, investigated a total of 9 m². The evaluation was undertaken between the 26th and 28th October 2010.

The ground surface within the area consisted of grass. The underlying geology of the area is mainly drift sand and gravel.

Archaeological background

The Landscape Research Centre Ltd (LRC) carried out a fluxgate gradiometer survey (Appendix 1), over the proposed development area. The magnetic response of the site was good, showing the presence of a number of features of potential archaeological origin (including ditches and a potential Grubenhaus).

It is worth noting that the fields west and east of Sherburn village has been subject of a thorough survey by LRC of which the results demonstrate that Sherburn is surrounded by intense settlement activity, related to the Iron Age, Romano-British, Anglo-Saxon and Middle Saxon period.

The entire field to the west of Vicarage Lane was surveyed in 2002, and indicated intense archaeological activity in the immediate vicinity.

Methodology

The aim of the investigation was to establish the extent, conditions and date of any archaeological remains detected by the fluxgate gradiometer survey, within the proposed development area. Furthermore the information gained will enable us to assess the potential and significance of the archaeology of the site in order to formulate a strategy to safeguard any surviving archaeology that may become at risk during the development of the site.

Two trenches each 3m by 1.5m in size were located within the development area. Trench AA was located to the centre of the garden in order to investigate some of the anomalies detected by the fluxgate gradiometer survey, whereas trench AB was positioned at the southern end of the site in the raised vegetable garden.

Both trenches were excavated by hand, and a written, drawn and digital photographic record was made of all deposits and features encountered in each trench. All trenches plans and sections were drawn at a scale of 1:10 and 1:20, and have been located on an Ordnance Survey digital map of the area, and lies at 34.14m AOD.

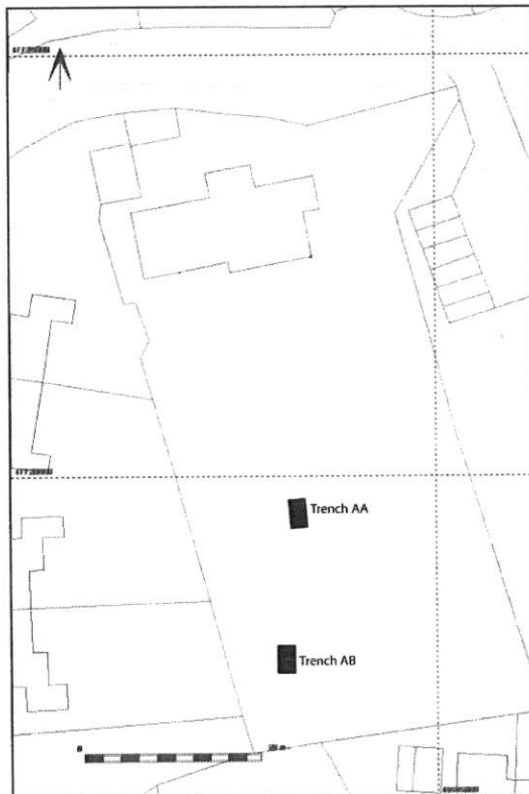


Figure 2: trench location

Results

A total of 32 contexts numbers were assigned to the deposits and features investigated within the two trenches. Two contexts were common in both trenches: context 1 and 8 allocated to the top soil, and 2 and 9 allocated to the subsoil.

Heavy occupational activity dating to the early and middle medieval period, was encountered in both trenches, in the form of floors, robed wall trenches, and a series of small and large pits.

With trench AB it was also possible to establish that from the Victorian to the modern time, the most southern part of the garden underwent a heavy re-landscape activity, by

adding and removing subsoil in order to create a raised ground. This operation however proved to be very detrimental for the early archaeological evidence, by removing whatever was buried within and under the original subsoil.

Trench AA

Trench AA measured 3m by 1.5m and was placed in the centre east part of the garden (Figure 2), in order to investigate the anomaly (anomaly 6) detected by the fluxgate gradiometer, (Figure 3). Undisturbed natural sand and gravel deposit was found at a depth of 1m from the garden surface.

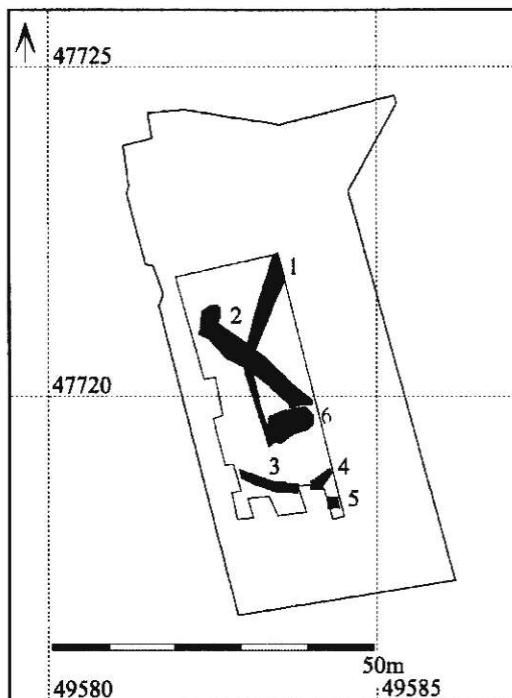


Figure 3: Interpretative plot of anomalies

Beneath the top soil (1) which measured 0.30m in depth, lay a layer of 0.15m deep of brown sandy silt material (2) interpreted as sub soil, which was on top of a rubble deposit (3) no thicker than 0.15m, of which mainly consisted of large and medium size of fragmented chalk blocks.

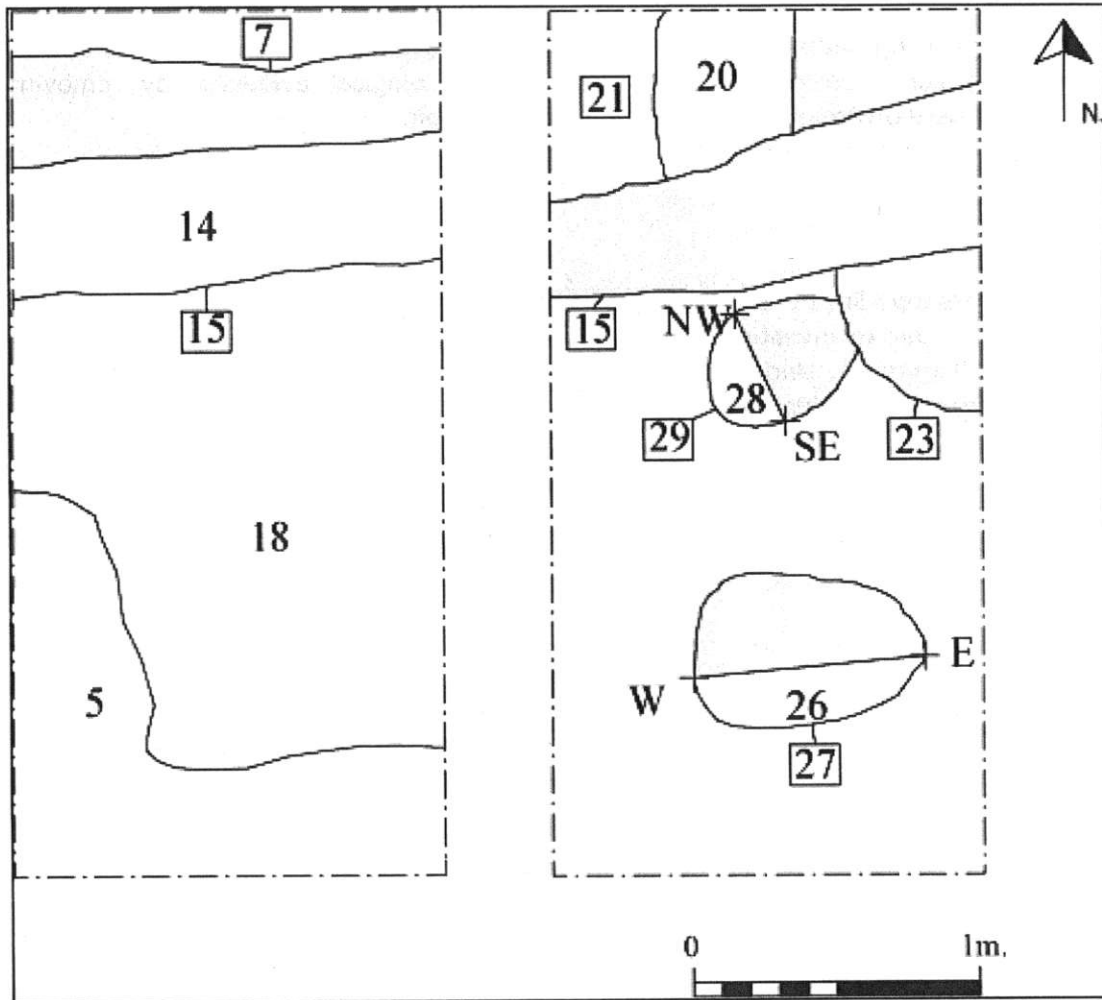


Figure 4: trench AA plans

Buried under the rubble (3) a sequence of two hard and compacted clay silty sand layers (5 and 19) (Figure 4 and Figure 5) were discovered and interpreted as floor surfaces of a possible large dwelling. Two, east to west aligned, small ditches (Figure 4) were recorded cutting the floor surface the earliest ditch (15) was identified as possible robbed wall trenches in phase with the floor surface 5.

Running on an east to west direction, ditch 7 (Figure 4 and Figure 5) measuring 0.35m in width and 0.25m in depth, was observed cutting ditch 15 which appeared to be an early feature measuring 0.70m in width and 0.60m in depth, and running on the same alignment of ditch 7. Both features were filled by a single dark brown sandy silt deposit (6 and 14).

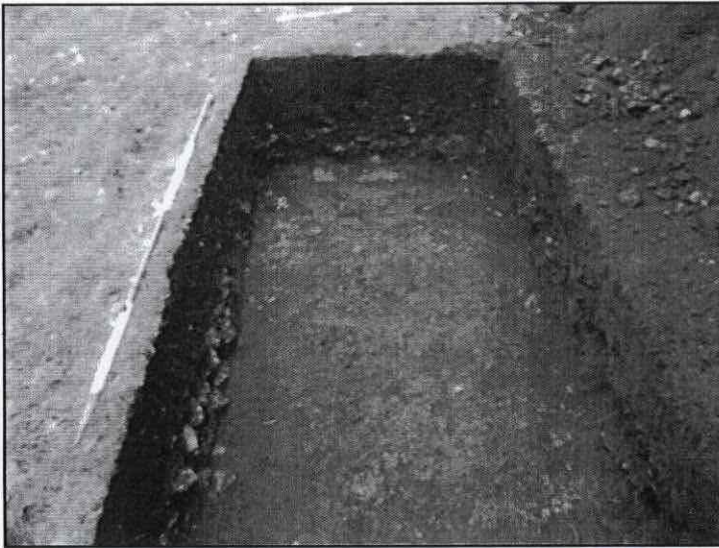


Figure 5: trench AA looking north, showing the floor surface, ditch 7 at the far end and pit 27

Two small pits (27 and 29) located to the centre of the trench were excavated (Figure 4 and Figure 6). These two pits of an ovate shape in plan and measuring 0.80m and 0.60m in length, 0.50m and 0.40m in width, were seen cutting the surface 5, to a depth of 0.30m. Both pits were filled by a similar material (26 and 28) a reddish brown clay silt deposit mixed with sporadic small chalk gravel. It is likely that these pits may have had a functional relationship with the floors (i.e. hosting a large post each).



Figure 6: trench AA looking south, showing pits 27, and 29

A large pit (21) located towards the north east corner of the trench were excavated (Figure 4 and Figure 7). It has not been possible to provide the full dimensions for this feature since it extended beyond the trench limits. Pit 21 was excavated to a depth of 1.10m and measured approximately 1.10m in width, and filled by a single deposit (20) a

reddish brown silty clay deposit mixed with small gravel. The excavation of this feature provided fragmented pottery dating to the 16th century and early.



Figure 7: showing the partly excavated pit 21, looking north

Of a smaller size, pit 23 (Figure 4) measured 0.80m in width and 0.90m in depth, and was filled by two deposits (Figure 8). The upper fill (32) consisted of a firm reddish brown sandy silt material mixed with occasional gravel, measuring 0.32m in depth. The rest of the pit was filled by a silty sand mottled deposit (22) measuring 0.57m in depth. Both pits were observed cutting through layer 5 and been cut by ditch 15.

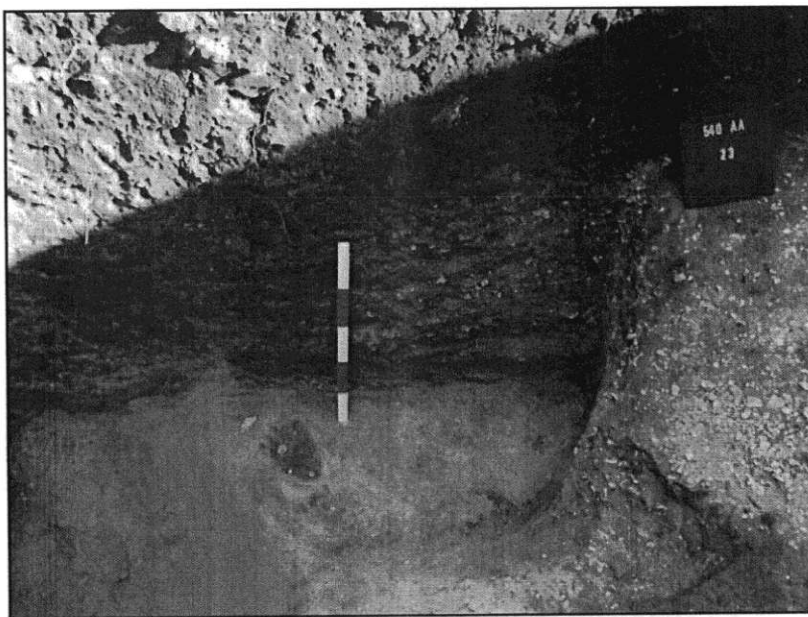


Figure 8: showing the excavated pit 23

As in pit 21, in pit 23 it was found fragmented pottery dating to the 16th century, or early.

It is likely that these two pits may have functioned as food storage pits, rather than rubbish pit, since no organic deposits were found at the base of neither of these features.

Another two possible large pits (17, and 25) were identified and recorded from the west and south sections of trench AA (Figure 9 and Figure 10).

Measuring 1.0m in width and 0.45m in depth, feature 17 was filled buy a single dark brown sandy silt deposit (16), mixed with occasional small fragmented chalk. Pit 25 was also filled by a single dark brown silty sand deposit (24) measuring 0.45m in width and 0.44m in depth. Due to the similarity of fill 16, 24 and deposit 18 it appeared impossible to distinguish the cut of the two pits in plan.

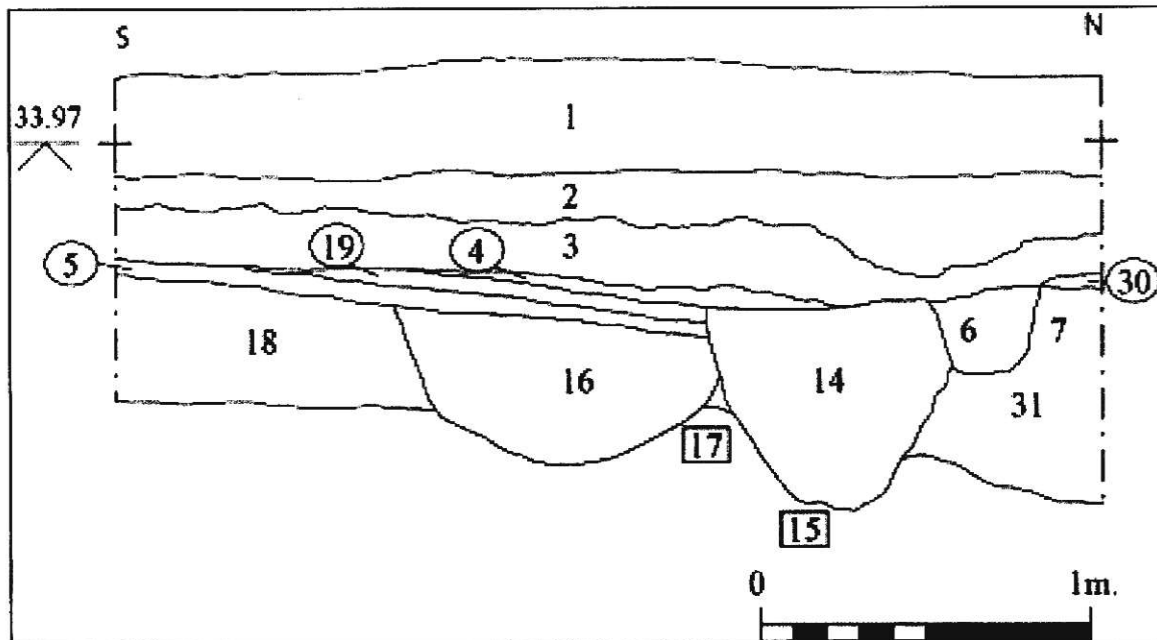


Figure 9: trench AA, east facing section

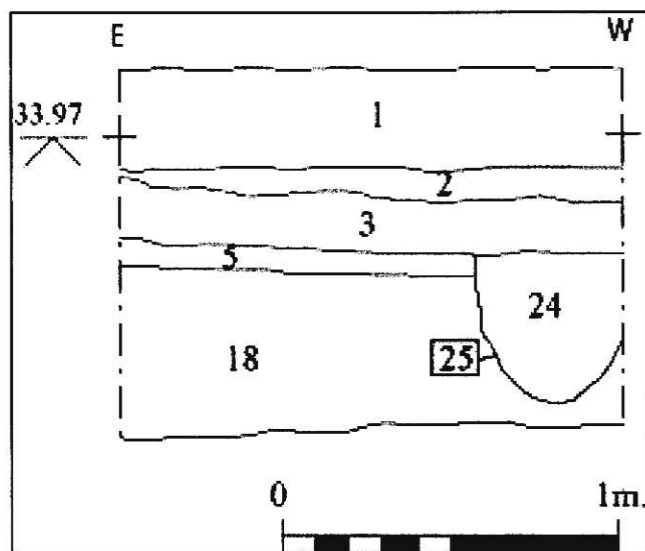


Figure 10: trench AA north facing section

Deposit 18 (Figure 9 and Figure 11) appeared to be made of a dark brown silty sand material mixed with small and medium fragmented chalk. This layer measuring in average 0.35m in depth was observed to be only present on the central and southern part of the trench. It is likely that this deposit may have been the make up ground for the floor 5. Fragmented pottery of the medieval period was found within layer 18.

Another deposit (31) measuring 0.64m in depth (Figure 9), similar to layer 18 and excavated as such, was identified as a reddish brown sandy clay layer mixed with chalk gravel and yellow sand. Deposit 18 and deposit 31 were separated by the ditch/trench 15, this may suggest that while deposit 18 may have functioned as the foundation for the floor 5, deposit 31 could have been the layer accumulated externally to a possible dwelling.

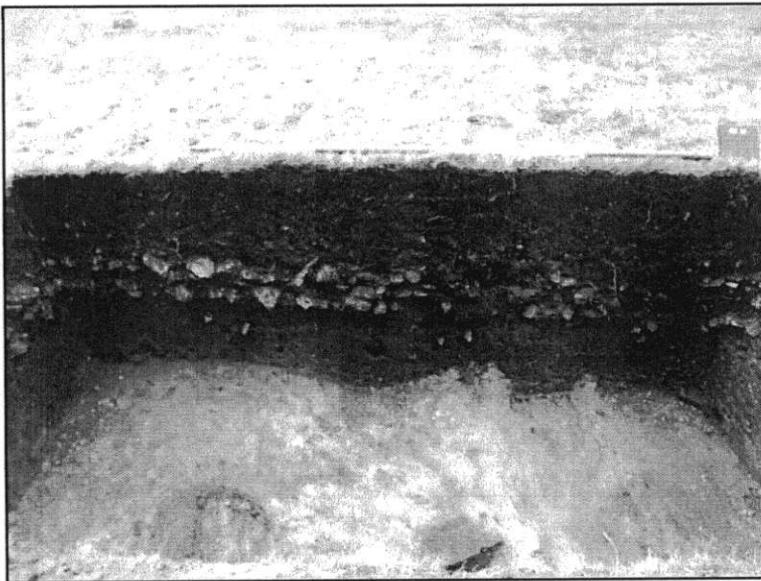


Figure 11: trench AA, east looking section

Trench AB

Trench AB was set on a north to south alignment, measuring 3m by 1.5m and was placed at the far end of the garden (Figure 1). Beneath the top soil (8) which measured 0.25m in depth, was a greyish brown sandy silt deposit (9) mixed with chalk rubble, ceramic building material (CBM), occasional gravel, of 1.15m in depth. Medieval and late medieval fragments of pottery were also found during the excavation of this deposit. Buried by deposit 9, there was a mid. grey brown clay sandy deposit (12) mixed with occasional gravel and wind blown sand measuring 0.40m in depth.

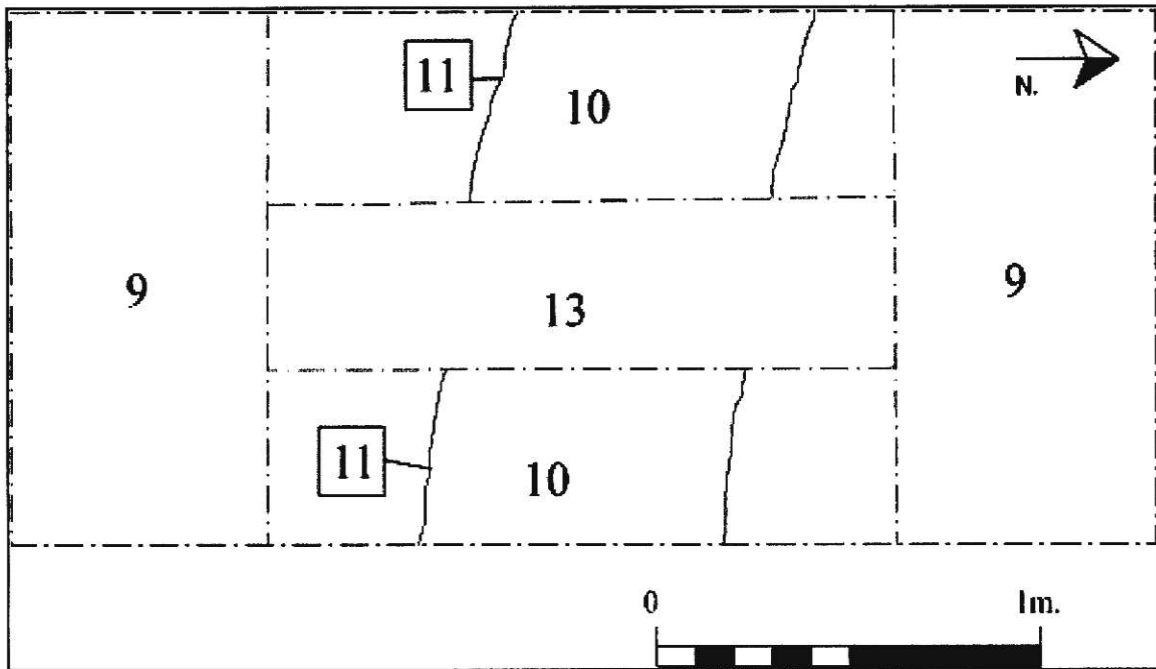


Figure 12: trench AB plan

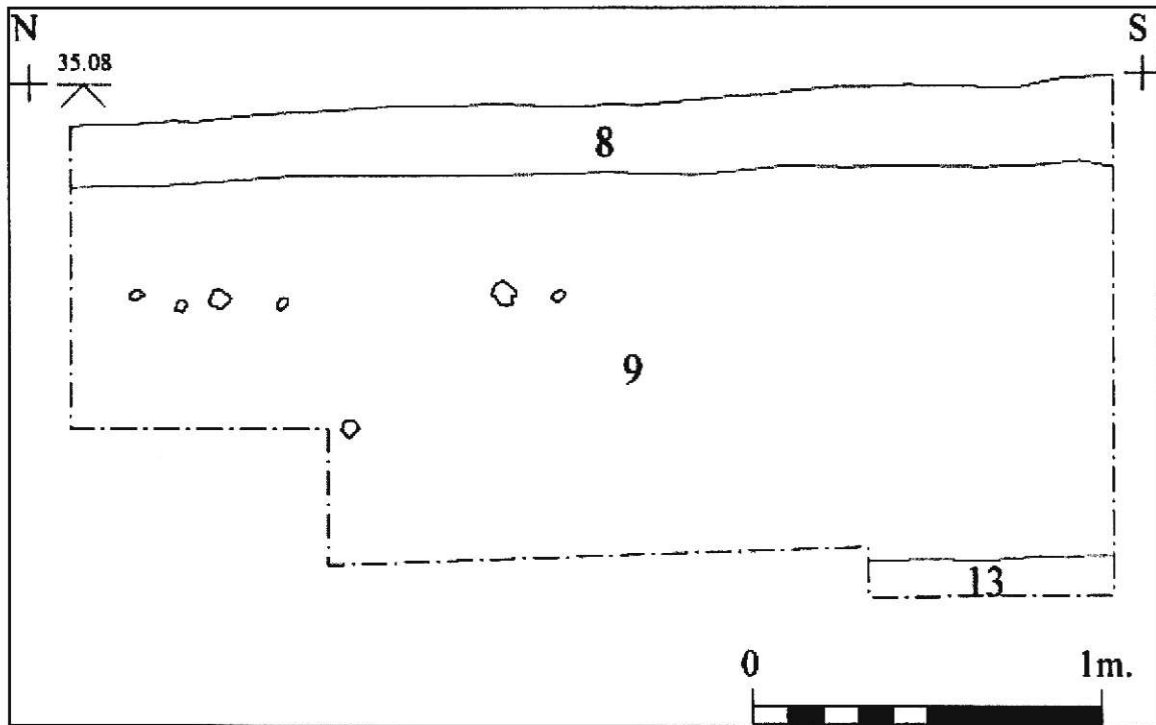


Figure 13: trench AB west facing section

A concentration of rubble (10) measuring 0.05m in depth, was noticed within deposit 9 (Figure 14), interpreted as a possible infill of a south east to northwest orientated robbed wall trench, although it appeared difficult to clearly identify any edges for the wall foundation trench (11).



Figure 14: trench AB, looking west

Although deposit 9 appeared to be a single thick layer deposited in a single event, the evidence gathered during excavation suggested that deposit 9 was a re-deposited layer of material that also contained disturbed evidence of occupational activity, in the form of medieval pottery, ceramic building material, and sporadic fragments of animal bones. Natural was reached at a depth of 1.70m from the ground level.

Conclusion

The aims of the archaeological investigation within the ground of the Old Vicarage garden were to establish the identity of some of the anomalies detected by the fluxgate gradiometer survey and establish if any evidence of medieval or earlier occupation survived beneath the garden ground.

In conclusion it is possible to ascertain that most of the ground of the Old Vicarage garden conceal abundant evidence of early and medieval occupational activity, in the form of dwellings and associated ground surfaces.

The excavation of trench AA revealed that medieval occupation activity dating to the 16th century, survived at a depth of 0.60m from the ground level. On the other hand the heavy re-landscape of the Victorian and modern period heavily obliterated evidence of early activity in the area, nevertheless the sporadic archaeological evidence encountered within the perimeter of trench AB appeared to be of circumstantial nature, possibly indicating that this area was on the fringe of any medieval occupation (i.e. fields associated to close houses).

Archaeological report by Gigi Signorelli MA

On behalf of the Trustees

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16th September 2010

Appendix One, list of context

Context No.	Type	Description	Area/Trench
1	Layer	Top soil	AA
2	Layer	Sub soil	AA
3	Layer	Chalk rubble deposit	AA
4	Layer	Dark brown sandy-silt deposit	AA
5	Layer	Floor surface under 19	AA
6	Fill	Fill of cut 7	AA
7	Cut	Linear feature	AA
8	Layer	Top soil	AB
9	Layer	Sub soil	AB
10	Fill	Fill of cut 11	AB
11	Cut	Cut of possible wall trench	AB
12	Layer	Deposit	AB
13	Layer	Deposit	AB
14	Fill	Fill of ditch/trench 15	AA
15	Cut	Cut of possible wall trench	AA
16	Fill	Fill of possible pit 17	AA
17	Cut	Cut of possible pit	AA
18	Layer	Reddish brown deposit	AA
19	Layer	Floor surface under 3 above 5	AA
20	Fill	Fill of pit 21	AA
21	Cut	Cut of pit	AA
22	Fill	Fill of pi 23	AA
23	Cut	Cut of pit	AA
24	Fill	Fill of pit 25	AA
25	Cut	Cut of pit	AA
26	Fill	Fill of pit 27	AA
27	Cut	Cut of pit	AA
28	Fill	Fill of pit 29	AA
29	Cut	Cut of pit	AA
30	Layer	Dark brown sandy-silt deposit	AA
31	Layer	Reddish brown deposit	AA
32	Fill	Fill of pit 23	AA

Table 1: list of contexts